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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine the knowledge and skills of teachers as they relate to school safety. Survey participants included 130 elementary and secondary school teachers enrolled in the Educational Administration Program at National University in San Diego (California). Areas covered included: knowledge of legal and professional responsibilities with regard to student behavior and school safety; skills for building a safe, positive, and nurturing school climate and for participating in ongoing safe school planning; and knowledge and skill in community involvement, crisis prevention and management, and building an effective relationship between the school and each student's home. Study results suggested that there was no significant difference between the knowledge and skills teachers felt they possessed in one category as opposed to another category noted in the survey. In general, respondents rated themselves "above average" in knowledge and skills in all areas. The survey instrument is appended. (ND)

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A Study of the Knowledge and Skills of Teachers on School Safety

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Paper Presented at the Mid-South Education Research Association, Tusaloosa, Alabama November 6, 1996

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Introduction

We are confronted daily with incidences of school violence that challenge the sanctity of what used to be a safe haven for our children. School safety is on the minds of Americans and certainly at the forefront of concern for educators across the nation. What we are faced with is the responsibility of taking a close look at what it is that our teachers must do to face the challenge this presence.

In 1992, the California Commission on Teaching Credentialing established a School Violence Advisory Panel for the purpose of exploring the topic of school safety and preparing a report to the Commission on the effects of school violence on students and school effectiveness, and on the preparation of certificated personnel. Furthermore, the panel presented recommendations to the commission that included specific suggestions for teachers. In the report, the panel references the California Education Codes and states:

> Societal changes combined with new legal mandates are reshaping the educator's role. Teachers must understand what the law requires and allows, and how to apply it in their school settings. Classroom and campus management, student rights, and responsibilities, equity, fairness, and appreciation for the unique cultural diversity of all individuals are central to this role.

It is essential that research is conducted for the purpose of determining teachers' points of view on how well they feel prepared to implement the recommendations from the Commission based on their knowledge and skills related to school safety.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study was to survey 130 teachers enrolled in the Education Administration Program at National University and from this sample, determine the knowledge and skills of the teachers as they relate to school safety.

Research Questions

The study attempted to answer the followings as they relate to knowledge and skills in the following areas:

1. Knowledge of legal and professional responsibility in regard to student behavior and school safety.
2. Skills for building a safe, positive, and nurturing school climate.
3. Knowledge and skills necessary to utilize and involve community members and resources in the educational program in order to build an effective relationship with the community.
4. Knowledge and skills in crisis prevention, crisis management, crisis containment, and crisis resolution.
5. Skills in participating in the on-going safe school planning process.
6. Knowledge and skills to build effective relationships between the school and each student's home.

A likert scale was used that reflected a range from poor to excellent and the response categories ranged from 1 to 5 (1=poor, 2=below average,

3=average, 4=above average, and 5=excellent). In addition, teachers were asked number of years they have taught, their grade level of teaching, and their respective school districts and counties where employed.

Delimitation and Limitations

The sample was taken from students enrolled in National University's Education Administration Program exclusively. Although the sample reflected a population from various locations in the State of California, six locations were referenced for the sample survey. In addition, from each grade level of elementary, middle, and secondary school, the number of respondents for each grade level fell below 120 and thus the generalizability resulted from the total number of respondents (n=130).

Review of the Literature

A review of the literature reflects an abundance of data that focuses on school safety as well as the dynamic influence that violence has in our communities. Historically, schools as institutions of learning have been relatively safe for our children and the professional educators who devote their careers to teaching and learning. This unfortunately has changed and currently multitudes of human and fiscal resources are devoted to addressing violence in our schools.

Harris, et. al., (1996) conducted a survey that focused on the school climate of the public schools throughout the nation. A total of 2,524 students were survey and the areas addressed included: (1) How well they get along with one another, (2) The level of social tension and violence

that exists in their schools; and (3) Their perceptions of equality among young people from different economic, racial, ethnic and religious backgrounds (p.1).

Significant to this report Harris discovered that students who say their teachers do a good job of teaching tolerance are much more likely to get along well with one another compared with those who say their teachers do a poor job (p.1). Additionally, one in four students reported having serious problems in their school with hostile or threatening remarks, physical fights, destructive acts other than physical fights, turf battles, and gang violence (p.2). Harris further reported the following:

> Students who give their teachers high marks for treating them with respect and caring about their futures, report better social relations at school than do students who give their teachers low marks. Also, students who feel their teachers do an effective job of teaching them how to be more tolerant of others who are different from themselves, are much more likely to get along better with one another (p.5).

An internet search yielded a variety of programs and funding sources both state and national devoted to investigating school violence, funding initiatives, and addressing trends. Included is the School/Law Enforcement Partnership that was founded in 1983, by the State Superintendent of Public Instruction and the Attorney General that unified their efforts to promote programs "designed to enhance school safety." The Safe and Drug Free Schools and Communities Act, Title IV of the Improving America's Schools Act of 1994, funds programs designed to face the challenge that our school face in regard to drugs and alcohol.

This act includes mentoring programs, conflict resolution training, and funding for initiatives that address the issues.

Further investigation suggests that numerous agencies either fund or promote support to groups or individuals willing to mobilize resources to help our youth. Among the most noted is the National School Safety Center headed by Ron Stephens, NSSC's Executive Director and sponsored by Pepperdine University. This organization is committed to violence prevention. Rosen (1993) reminds us that violence is an old problem with new fears attached to the lives of our children. He tells us that it is time for violence reduction to catch the attention of educators as well as the public (p.9). This is happening throughout our nation, but regardless of the ambition of either individuals or nationally renowned organizations, it is not happening fast enough or with enough resources to keep pace with the increase of violence in our schools. English (1992, p. 24) states, "Planning for a crisis is probably not the priority of school administrators. With other more immediate challenges of operating a school. Delaying this planning, however, may ensure chaos if and when such a crisis occurs."

If school violence is escalating and school safety is on the line, then what can be done about it? A further review of the literature suggests that the connotation of the subject of violence has developed such a broad perspective. that facing the challenge of focusing on just one area of concern has become a time consuming prospect for educators. Ranging from bullying to battery the quantum leap from one violence category to the next overwhelms even the most experienced educators. Take for example, gun safety. This is a topic new to the educational systems in regard to pubic school safety. A closer look brings ours attention to elementary schools and to the increasing number of gun related

incidences. Clough (1996, p. 26) serves as the president of the Gun Safety Institute of Cleveland, Ohio, and offers the following, "Needs for excitement, power, safety, and self-esteem are normal and healthy; these needs become problematic only when violence is used in an attempt to satisfy them". Clough developed a plan to implement curriculum materials for fourth and fifth graders on the topic of gun safety.

At the other end of the spectrum, but drawing no less attention, is the issue of sexual harassment in schools. Teaching gender equity and respect has become an integral focus for today's curriculum. Peterson (1996) reports:

> Defining sexual harassment concepts and teaching preventive skills can be more effective and welcome when such concepts and skills are considered in the context of broader, pro-social outcomes....Teachers cannot assume that the children they face every day in classrooms have needed coping skills... Often today's students are surrounded by sadness, violence, and disapproval rather than support and empowerment (p.23).

In the report from the California Teaching Commission's Advisory Panel, training needed for teachers to address school violence included: (1) multicultural sensitivity and awareness, (2) conflict management and resolution, (3) communication and interpersonal skills, (4) listening and other counseling skills, and (5) classroom management and discipline (p.10).

In her article, Lantieri (1995) introduces a "new way of fighting." As the National Director, for the Resolving Conflict Creatively Program (RCCP), she assists existing school programs in finding ways to end the violence between diverse groups of people. The goal of RCCP is to

emphasize teacher training in an intensive format. It comes at the cost of thirty-three dollars per student which can be a substantial fee with the number of students in need of curriculum on school safety.

How can we afford to manage such a financial burden? How do we teach valuable lessons to our students that concentrate so evidently on violence without creating fear? Where does the funding come from and who does the training, when it is apparent that the curriculum content falls outside the range of knowledge and skills areas that some teachers feel they possess? What do we compromise and what do we lose? Better yet, how can we teach reading and writing to children who are more concerned about their safety than their grade in English? How do we convince teachers to invest more and more time in staff development on topics that appear at first glance to neglect the basics?

As with any investigation, the questions that arise with the challenges that we face us are more in number than the resolutions we offer to the problem. The topic of school violence and the issue of school safety is no exception.

Methodology and Results

One hundred and fifty surveys were distributed to teachers enrolled in the Education Administration Program at National University. The respondents who asked to rate their knowledge and skills in areas related to school safety. One hundred and thirty were returned representing a cross section of elementary (n=55), middle (n=41), and secondary (n=34) school teachers. The results indicated that there was no significant difference between the knowledge and skills they feel they possess in any

category as opposed to another category noted in the survey. The mean scores for all categories ranged from 3.8-4.2 on a scale of from 1 to 5 with 1 reflecting a "poor" level of knowledge and skill. In general, the respondents rated themselves "above average" in knowledge and skills in all areas.

Recommendations for Further Investigation

Due to the wide range of categories that address school violence and the diverse topics related to school safety, it is recommended that future research should focus on bringing together information that is specific and useful for the purpose of promoting school safety. Furthermore, it would be useful to survey teachers who are not enrolled in an education administration credential program and compare the results of the research with the study conducted with teachers who are enrolled in an education administration credential program to validate this research.

Summary and Conclusion

We are looking toward a new millennium and an increasing trend toward violence in our communities and in our schools. As educators, we must not fail our children by avoiding the facts and hope that it will "just go away." Instead, we must collectively continue to conduct research and bring into the lives of our teachers valuable curriculum designed to help them teach in an environment that is laced with concerns for the safety of students.

Furthermore, although the review of the literature included successful programs designed to address school safety, it also unveiled evidence of far too many agencies who operate alone, and too many independent thinkers who offer quick fixes to difficult systemic issues that surround the subject of school safety.

We do not have time to waste, and we must respond with a collective purpose. Our children deserve it. One way in which we can respond to this challenge, is to pursue research that supports the feasibility of implementing recommendations that come forth from agencies such as the California Commission on Teaching Credentialing.

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Appendix I

SCHOOL SAFETY SURVEY

Please respond to the following survey. This instrument is intended to measure your knowledge and skills as they relate to school safety. Circle your response.

	Poor	Below Average	Average	Above Average	Excellent
I. Knowledge of legal and professional responsibilities in regard to student behavior and school safety.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Skills for building a safe, positive, and nurturing school climate.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Knowledge and skills necessary to utilize and involve community members and resources in the educational program in order to build an effective relationship with the community.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Knowledge and skills in crisis prevention, crisis management, crisis containment, and crisis resolution.	1	2	3	4	5
5. Skills in participating in the on-going safe school planning process.	1	2	3	4	5
6. Knowledge and skills to build effective relationships between the school and each student's home.	1	2	3	4	5

I have been teaching for _____ years.

Most of my teaching has been _____elementary _____middle _____secondary

School District _____ County _____